

# Idaho wine industry gradually builds in-state market share

By *Eric Degerman* on February 19, 2014



Moya Dolsby has been serving as the executive director of the Idaho Wine Commission since 2008.

(Photo by Eric Degerman/Great Northwest Wine)

BOISE, Idaho — Wineries in Idaho want to build a following for their industry across the United States, but support needs to grow within state borders, where their market share stands at a mere 5.8 percent.

That was one of the key messages Tuesday in Boise to kick off the [Idaho Wine Commission's](#) annual industry meeting, and its leader shared her approach when visiting restaurants throughout the Gem State.

"I ask them, and if they don't have Idaho wine, then I order Diet Coke," said executive director Moya Dolsby. "Before we take on the country and the world, we need to conquer Idaho, and we need all the restaurants to carry Idaho wine."

Idaho's market share within its own state grew to 5.8 percent, which compares with 36 percent in Washington. The Evergreen State's market share stood at 18 percent about 15 years ago.

Commission chairman Gregg Alger celebrated the 35 percent increased presence in their religiously conservative state early on within his welcome message at the Boise Hotel and Conference Center. In 2012, the Idaho wine industry's market share was just 3 percent.

"I do feel like we need to focus a lot of our efforts internally and win the hearts of locals constituents," Alger said. "A 1 percent increase in market share in the state of Idaho represents about 46 tons of fruit. At an average of 4 tons per acres, that's 10 acres."

Moments later, Alger, who owns Huston Vineyards in Caldwell, asked for a show of hands among winemakers who wish they had more fruit and new varieties for 2014. A majority raised their hands as Idaho stands at 50 wineries and 1,200 acres of vineyard.

"I cry to the growers in this room. It is a serious, serious situation that we have on our hands if we want to grow this industry," Alger said. "We need high quality vitis vinifera. We're out three or four years before we can use the grapes."

In terms of promotions, Gov. Butch Otter — a Catholic — proclaimed June as Idaho Wine Month starting in 2009. That promotion includes the sold-out Savor Idaho public tasting as well as restaurants throughout the state adding Idaho wines to their list.

"We've seen double-digit growth during June over previous years," Alger said. "What we need to do is get the restaurants to add Idaho wines to the menus in the follow months."

To help measure the growth of Idaho's wine industry, Dolsby said her office has commissioned a new economic impact study for the state. The study was last conducted in 2007 and released in 2008.

"This is the component that helps us lobby down at the state level for those things we need to grow and enhance our industry," Alger said. "When we met with the press, we are continually asked what is the impact of this industry locally?"

Full Glass Research's study of the Oregon wine industry in 2010 reflected an economic activity related to wine at \$2.7 billion and produced 13,518 wine-related jobs. Washington's study of 2010, conducted by Stonebridge Research indicated an in-state impact \$8.6 billion with 29,672 jobs. Both companies are based in St. Helena, Calif.

**NOTES:** Based on assessments, Idaho produced 3,800 tons of grapes and generated 437,584 gallons of wine in 2012. ... Dolsby's industry update included a reminder to her members for them to stop playing recorded music at their tasting rooms, suggesting they offer only live performances of original music. She said **Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI)**, an industry leader in music rights management, continues to take legal action against violators. "We cannot fight them, and you will not win," Dolsby said. ... Tickets to the sixth annual **Savor Idaho** will go on sale March 1, and for the first time, there will be a VIP, early-entry pass. The food and wine festival is set for June 8 at the Idaho Botanical Gardens. Attendance is capped at 900 guests, and last year's Savor Idaho was sold out two weeks in advance. ... Ron Bitner of Bitner Vineyards received the certification for Low-Input Enology and Viticulture from L.I.V.E. executive director Chris Serra. After handing out the award, Serra announced that Dolsby will be appointed to an ex-officio position on the L.I.V.E. board of directors. ... One point of interest in Idaho wines is reflected on the commission's website, which Dolsby reported now averages 5,100 monthly unique visitors. Washington and New Jersey are the two states that contribute the most traffic.